

HOW I DID NOT BECOME A TRADITIONAL RABBI



In 1967 I moved to Moscow from the Urals where I lived, and somewhere in June - July 1973 I was graduated and became an engineer for automation engineering (specialization: robots, manipulators, etc.). I passed the 2nd and 3rd years of my studies within a year and graduated with honors. My scientific manager at the time was the world-renowned professor Boguslavsky, who invited me to stay in graduate school. He immediately offered me a position of a Jr. Researcher to write a dissertation on the subject, which he was evolving. My future as a scientist was bright...

But by the autumn of that year, I suddenly did something very "stupid" in the opinion of my friends, family, relatives, professor B. and all others who knew me: as I OFFICIALLY went to study in a Jewish seminary at the main Synagogue of Moscow city in the Arkhipov street. (A bursary in the seminary was then insignificantly small - about 10 rubles/month).

In order to become a student, it was necessary to pass a special screening by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, after which I was officially enrolled as student at the seminary.

I grew up in a simple religious Jewish family, but my parents did not teach me to read and write Hebrew. And so, now becoming a student of the seminary, I quickly began to study Hebrew, prayers, the Talmud, etc. In my group also studied Rabbi Eliyahu Essas (or, simply, Ilya, he is now one of the most famous and leading orthodox rabbis and he lives in Jerusalem. However, he is well known for his ardent hatred for and intolerance of Kabbalah.)

Meanwhile the young Shayevich (who was formerly the chief rabbi of Russia, and now, perhaps, the chief Rabbi of Moscow) has already been studying for a year and a half in a yeshiva in Budapest to get smicha - the diploma and the title of rabbi. And so, after three or four months of study at the seminary, I became one of the best and promising students.

Then, during my studies in the seminary, the chief rabbi of the USSR was Mr. Fisher, a good natured, but Torah illiterate Jew. (And before him it was rabbi Levin. He was a talmid-chacham, a Torah scholar). In the day time I studied under great Mr. Gurevich, and in the evenings (and nights, separately from all, secretly), I also studied under the great tzaddik and

talmid-chacham rabbi Miller - the last of the Mohicans, one of the greatest scholars of the Torah and Talmud in Russia! At that time he already served a sentence of 10 years in Siberia for teaching the Holy scriptures. After all, unauthorized teaching the holy language and the Torah was then, in 1973 - 1975 strictly prohibited and relentlessly pursued by the Soviet law! Curious is the fact that students were also punished for studying in such "illegal" form.

And so, at the time there already were concrete plans to send first Ilya Essas to study in the yeshiva in Budapest with the purpose of becoming a rabbi. (There already was a chronic shortage of skilled rabbis throughout the Soviet Union). But in the spring of 1974 Ilya suddenly gets thrown out of yeshiva, as it turned out that he is a refusnik, who participated, also in a demonstration in protest of the obstacles to leave the USSR for Israel.

Then the Jewish synagogue leadership turned its gaze at me and at Yakov Rykhlin (in a couple of years, he left to the US.) We were being intensively prepared for the departure to Budapest, so we could study there to become a rabbi (with a lovely outlook towards the very near future - as just in a couple of years of study, and with my devotion, obviously, even quicker, to become a respected rabbi, if not in Moscow, then certainly in a major city of Russia or in a capital of some union republic!). Future of a major religious official was shining brightly towards me...

But for the holiday of Shavuot, suddenly arrives in Moscow the world famous Rav Teitz from New Jersey (USA). And he - oddly enough – has a "request for me." It turns out that his aunt lived in a city in Ural, where I came from to Moscow, etc. So then he asked me to give something to her, I do not even remember what it was. So was the need from above... Then, on the day of Shavuot, which coincided with the Sabbath, after the service in the main synagogue in the Arhipov street (there, in front of the synagogue, stood a crowd of people of whom were protestors – refusniks, as they were denied permission to leave for Israel, the family members or sympathizers. Meanwhile the inside and outside of the premises was swarming with KGB agents!

Rav Teitz leaves the synagogue with me and leads me to the hotel National opposite the Gremlin, where he was staying. While I am... like, a lamb, do not resist to go with him... And so, after a brief stay in his room, I went out to go home, when suddenly a man approached me and inquired about Rabbi Teitz. He was a KGB agent. "What do you think, why did Rabbi Teitz came here? And other similar questions. It was followed by: "We very much encourage you to cooperate with us in transfer of any information that may be of interest to us."

...By nature, I am not a hero, so, starting with the very next day, I stopped going to the synagogue and the seminary, but sent instead my mother there, in order to tell the Jewish leadership that I have to leave the seminary "due to health reasons."

However in the evenings and nights I continued to study INDIVIDUALLY with Rabbi Miller and Gurevich.

That's how I was saved then from the unclean powers... to become later a SPIRITUAL RABBI in the Lurian Kabbalah!